

The Heart of the Matter

Lesson 3: The Christian's Attitude Toward the Scriptures

1. Treasured Correspondence

Have you ever gotten a letter from someone that had particular significance? Perhaps it was a love letter from your sweetheart or maybe a letter of reconciliation from an estranged friend. We read such letters over and over again, each time reliving the emotions generated by the words.

The Scriptures are a special, detailed correspondence from the mind of God. Those who are Christians acknowledge both the divine origin and inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) as well as the human agency of the writers. *"But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God ... Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God"* (1 Cor. 2:10, 12).

It is not the book itself – the cover, pages and ink – that is special but the very thoughts and principles contained therein. In the Scriptures God has revealed the redemptive threads which gather human history into a coherent purpose. God has revealed the nature of man – his thought processes, ambitions, weaknesses and the divine imprint upon his soul.

In the Bible God speaks of eternal destiny, a matter that consumes our thinking as our life relentlessly speeds toward its end. *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law"* (Deut. 29:29). There is no sense

engaging in baseless speculation and guesswork about things which God has not revealed. We can fill our lives with reflection and concentration upon what He *has revealed* and never fully grasp it all. What should our attitudes be toward the correspondence of our Creator to us?

2. Hunger and Thirst

The Scriptures are sometimes spoken of in metaphors related to food such as milk/meat (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 3:1-2). Thus, the corresponding appetite – hunger and thirst – is used to describe one's desire for the Scriptures: *"... as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby"* (1 Pet. 2:2). While physical hunger is "built in," spiritual hunger must be created. It comes from the realization that we need resources from outside ourselves if we are to be perfected in faith.

Just as our bodies are fueled and fortified by food, so our spirits are nourished by the insight and instruction of God's word: *"If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed"* (1 Tim 4:6).

Hunger and thirst imply eagerness to eat, not reluctance or apathy. Christians should not have to be coerced into feeding upon the word of God, and those who have little spiritual appetite are yet immature. They are like the young child out playing and having too much fun to come in and eat.

3. Love for Truth

If we genuinely love and appreciate the author of the Scriptures, we will have a corresponding affection for what He says. In response to everything God has said Satan and his allies have issued denials, distortions and disinformation. There is hardly any aspect of God's word that has escaped perversion of some sort.

False prophets and idolaters in the Old Testament opposed truth. The New Testament is likewise replete with warnings against perversions of truth.

Acts 20:30 – *“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”* “Perverse” is from the Gk. word *diastrepho*, “to distort, twist” (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 180). Even some among the elders in Ephesus, taught faithfully by Paul, would twist the truth out of shape.

Gal. 1:7 – *“... but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ ...”*. This refers to the Judaizers who did so much damage to Paul's influence. “Pervert” is from the Gk. word *metastrepho*, “to transform into something of an opposite character” (ibid).

1 Tim. 4:1-2 – *“... in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy ...”*.

1 Tim. 6:3-5 – *“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth ...”*.

2 Tim. 4:3-4 – *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”*

4. Balancing Love for Truth

Since the Scriptures reveal the very thoughts and will of God, our devotion to Him will elevate our respect for His word above all else. If we love someone else more than we love the truth, then we become idolaters.

Some put their family ties above the truth. When some family member becomes unfaithful, they resist and criticize congregational efforts to discipline. Others deny plain words of Scripture because they know their loved one did not believe and practice what the Scriptures taught. Some may condone a preacher or teacher who fosters error because they feel so attached to him.

Our personal feelings can interfere with loyalty to the truth. Paul saw this principle at work in Peter, who fell into hypocrisy along with Barnabas (Gal 2:11-13). His assessment: *“But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel ...”* (2:14). Paul saw a much deeper, more serious problem in the shunning of the Gentile brethren than just hurt feelings; he saw a sinful compromise of the truth.

On the other hand we must not let blind zeal turn us into nit-pickers, cranks and zealots who create suspicion and foment controversy. The New Testament condemns this mindset as well as cowardly compromise:

1 Tim 1:4, 6-7 – *“... nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification*

which is in faith ... from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm."

Tit 3:9 – *"But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless."*

We must channel our love for God and respect for His word into being good students of the Scriptures. We must know our own beliefs and the basis for them; we must prepare ourselves to competently defend the truth against detractors; we must examine ourselves in

light of the Scriptures to see our flaws and shortcomings.

Conclusion: It is our attitude toward the truth more than anything else – formal education, feeble memory, length of time as a Christian – that will determine how much we know, retain and can utilize. May we all say with the Psalmist:

"My heart stands in awe of your word. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure. I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law. Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments. Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalms 119:161-165).

Questions for Discussion

1. What can we learn from the Jews regarding Bible study (John 5:39-47; Acts 13:27)?
2. How can our emotions interfere with our acceptance of the truth?
3. What factors lead to a genuine appetite for God's word?
4. Discuss the balance between patience with a young Christian with imperfect knowledge and rebuke of a contentious brother. How can we distinguish between them?
5. What must accompany the hearing of the word (cf. Jas. 1:22-25; 1 John 3:18)?